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DECORATION & FURNITURE

OPEN FIRE-PLACES.



NOTHING has been more pleasant to note, in the home-life of the winter that is just now over and gone, than the growing use of open fires in our living-rooms, either of soft coal in grates or of wood on the hearth. Furnaces are certainly going out of favor as a sole means of heating our dwelling-

houses, though it is not likely they will ever be given up; we shall continue to use them for tempering the air of entries and passage-ways, and of those rooms that are only opened now and then. We cannot be governed in this matter by English example. Our climate is so very different from that of our island cousins that the "robust" theory of living they put so splendidly into practice would neither be healthy nor comfortable for us. Certainly we may come in time to live more hardily than we now think we can bear; children will be less cockered and coddled by their elders, and the elders themselves will take more liberal doses of whatever weather is going, and so cut down their doctors' bills.

But, to get all the good possible out of our open fires, we want two things—fire-places properly built for burning wood, and grates for burning coal, that shall be both pretty and economizing of fuel. Owing probably to our long disuse of wood as fuel, we have lost the rules for building fire-places that shall throw the heat well out into the room, and let us look our fill at the fire. We make our fire-places too square, and too deep, with sides too nearly at right angles to the back. The fire is hid in a cave, and the chimney eats up nearly all the heat. The fire-places in the old Dutch and New England houses are low in proportion to their breadth, and shallow, with sides well splayed. This way of building has a single eye to use, but as always happens when use is honestly put first in devising useful things, the ends of beauty are also served. The old fire-places were not only sufficient for their work, they were well proportioned, handsome to look at, and showed the whole beauty of the fire. We cannot make a fire-place for burning wood that shall be either serviceable or handsome, by simply taking the anthracite coal grates out of our chimneys, and lining the hole that is left with tiles or soap-stone. Out of such a hole it is not easy, it is probably impossible, by any device, to make what we want. But if a man is building a house, and wishes to have an open wood-fire, he must look to it that the chimney is rightly built from the start.

So long, however, as our American bituminous coals are as plentiful, good and cheap as they are at present, burning wood will be only a luxury for the rich, and soft coal, as we have agreed to call the bituminous fuel, will be more and more used. We are greatly in need of the right sort of grate for burning soft coal, and it were much to be wished that some one of our dealers in grates would either import such from England, where they are cheap and plenty, or would have them made here at home. We have one kind of grate, broad, low and generous, in which either soft coal or wood can be burned indifferently, but these grates are too large for the rooms in the greater part of our houses, and they are not economizing of fuel—a small fire is lost in them.

Now, in general, a New York house, if it be not on a corner, does not need a large fire in any one of the rooms. Our houses, with their party walls, keep one another warm, and only the narrow ends of the packing-boxes are exposed to the air. What is wanted, then, is the small English grate, holding but little coal, but throwing out into the room almost all the heat produced in combustion. Such a grate is figured in the book, "The House Beautiful," on page 230, but this is only one design out of many manufactured in England. They are made in shapes that admit of a good deal of ornament, the bar strongly and gracefully curved, with brass posts, or iron posts brass-mounted, at the sides, and back pieces with bold patterns cast in relief, and sometimes the grate is a coal-basket, or made to look like one, and supported on large andirons, with a great deal of brass ornamentation. Sometimes even a grate border of plain pattern (like the one referred to above) is cast in brass instead of iron. But when there is a brass fender, and brass-handled fire-irons, and

a copper or brass coal-hod, the brass grate-border is sure to be too much. If it is decided to have it, it would be better to have less brass in the other belongings of the fire-place.

In the best of these English grates, the ornamentation is kept simple, and is accented here and there to avoid commonplace. In one I have in my own house the pattern on the frame is only a running vine in narrow lines that run parallel to the sides, both on the sides of the frame and on the top, not changing their direction; then, round the opening there is a narrow border set with small whorls. All this is clearly designed and cast with neatness, but the effect is quiet, not at all striking. If, now, the face of the grate were kept straight, and were plain faced, the grate would have a monotonous look. This is avoided by giving a double curve to each bar, and ornamenting the face of each with a bead on the upper and lower edge, and a running vine between the beads. This enriches the whole grate, and gives it character. Then comes the small movable (and, at pleasure, removable) hob, and seems to put forth a hospitable hand of welcome to the guest as he draws near the laughing fire. These grates are cheap in England; what makes them dear, here, is the custom duty, the expense of packing, and the cost that always goes with any single importation. If they could be imported by some firm in quantities, they would not cost so much; for though the duty would be the same, the charge for packing and handling them would be distributed. But there is no reason why they should not make them here.

In another paper I will say something about the decorative treatment of the fire-place, the mantel-piece, and other belongings of the chimney-pier. As an "envoi" take to-day this verse attributed by an old writer to Homer. This gives us an authority of respectable antiquity for taking pleasure in an open fire. "A man is proud of his children, a town of its battlements, a plain of its horses, the ocean of its navies, riches ornament the house, just judges seated in the hall of justice are a noble spectacle, but the most pleasant sight, in my opinion, is that of a fire on the hearth, when Jupiter decks the ground with snow and frost."

CLARENCE COOK.

THE UNION CLUB.

THE dimensions of this stately building probably exceed those of any similar one in the United States. Its situation, as a fair majority of cultivated New Yorkers know, is at the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-first street. The sole entrance for members is on the side street just mentioned; massive doors of a severely simple sort are guarded at either base of the broad stoop by two imposing lamps. Through these rather majestic portals we enter the lower main hall of the building. Here the airy height of the ceilings, which meet the eye in a series of groined arches, first attracts us; but it is a height perfectly in proportion with the fine expansive hall itself, and produces no impression of incongruity. This hall, like all the larger apartments in the club, suggests that the new decorative ideas have invaded the building with considerable vigor, while they may not yet be said to have gained the mastery. Here, as elsewhere, they seem to struggle resolutely against the old-fashioned naturalistic forms. The wainscoting is a conventional Eastlake design, in chocolate-color and drab-green. The walls and arches, however, are frescoed with foliage and flowers accurately copied from nature. Perhaps the delicate shades and aerial, garlanded look of these ceilings should be called rather discordant with the heavy walnut staircase, at whose foot stands a handsome lamp on a newel post. One is almost impressed with some such attempted union as that of a mediæval English abbey and the lighter gracefulness of an Italian villa. This hall contains a superb pendant lamp, probably of wrought brass, whose ground-glass plates are most tastefully embellished; the whole affair, however, beautiful and curious as it is, should be less on the colossal plan, for perfect harmonization, even with a hall so broad and lofty. This floor is inlaid with the ordinary marble tiling of black and white. Its general effect is not without princeliness, though some of its details have been rather audaciously combined.

There are two "salons" on the ground floor—one in the east and one in the west portion of the building. The latter is by far the more pretentious room; it is indeed

not without a magnificence peculiarly its own. Immense in area, its floor is carpeted with warm, deep crimson, delightfully refreshing to the eye. All the woodwork is drab, in likeness to the paper, which bears a large gold "fleur de lis," in quatre-foils of light drab on a dark drab ground. The furniture of this apartment is especially odd. It is of some velvety material, and its changeable greenish-brown color doubtless represents one of those peculiar shadings recently brought to notice by William Morris, the English poet. The mantels, here as in almost every other chamber throughout the club, are especially worthy of note. They are of walnut, adorned with narrow gold panelings, on which vine-like adornments of leafage are painted with admirable skill. The chief mirror at the west end of this room deserves more than passing notice. It is set within a sort of alcove, with striking pilasters and entablatures to serve as its frame, these being embellished with exquisite semblances of running vines. "Student" lamps are used in this apartment, and the broad, low tables are covered with morocco-cased files of all the best London and New York weeklies.

The large room which faces on Fifth Avenue, is considerably smaller than the one just described, though its spaciousness is still a very distinct fact. Its carpet (which a witty member of the club once likened to "chow-chow") is of small, irregular figures, scattered over a ground of mustard-yellow. The furniture is a velvet rep, rich olive-brown in hue, and the leather wall-papery, on which is embossed a diaper-pattern of brown, black and gold, amid a green ground, has become the admiration of all who enjoy what is loveliest and most unique in upholstery. In the midst of this room is a circular divan, dear to the soul of the traditional club-lounger. The ceilings are heavily paneled and of much lighter tone than the walls. Three broad windows look forth upon Fifth Avenue. On the capacious tables are to be found copies of all the better New York daily journals. A voluminous oriental "portière" drapes the main doorway leading from the hall.

On the second floor the principal appointments of the hall are similar to those below. On our right, as we ascend the soft-carpeted stairs, we find the billiard-room; directly in front is the reading-room, or library, and on our left we gain a glimpse of the card-room. The design of the billiard-room walls may be called, as usual, mixed Eastlake and naturalistic. The wainscotings are delightfully quaint, being semi-Moorish in character. The floor is overspread with soft red rugs. The tables are of mingled satinwood and maple, and costly in the extreme. Black leather cushions line the walls of this apartment, and over them, at various intervals, jut forth chandeliers of nickel and brass, which, like those immediately above the billiard tables, are notable for their original nicety of workmanship.

The card-room is carpeted in warm crimson, while its wall-papery is fawn color, with a small sunflower as principal Queen Anne detail. The woodwork throughout is of ebony. Small card-tables, scattered here and there, at once attest the character of this room, whose chief defect is possibly a too sharp bringing together of contrasts. The mantel-effects are positive marvels of beauty, the mantels themselves being of ebony, with a red marble fireplace beneath.

Perhaps the most attractive and beautiful room in the club is its library. This is, in reality, two rooms, with a folding-door between them, kept constantly open. The low book-cases are of mahogany, while all the remaining woodwork is painted a dull, sombre red. The walls are of pale green, with very charming Eastlake decorations, while Hebrew inscriptions in gilt characters gleam at intervals along the ceiling. Two very long tables, covered with green leather, bear a number of rare faience and porcelain lamps—these tables themselves being strictly in the Queen Anne pattern, with vermiculated panels set into their mahogany sides. The mantels, also mahogany, are likewise of the Queen Anne style, but here the total absence of blue china is a conspicuous point, their niches being perfectly empty. The carpet and "portières" of this apartment are of dull tints, but the chandeliers, made of cedar-wood with fantastic embellishments, are remarkable for their beauty and brilliancy.

In the very extensive dining-room, on the third floor of the building, we find a light tone prevalent, though the gold-and-brown paper is divided into large panels